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## FSM milestone: 1000 named supporters!

## Recommendations for pathology testing in Australia

The Friends of Science in Medicine (FSM) Pathology Advisory Group was set up in 2012 to address concerns about the inappropriate use of non-validated and often non-credible pathology tests, marketed directly to the public or sold by alternative practitioners. The results of these tests are often misinterpreted to give a false diagnosis, followed by the sale of an unregistered intervention procured from the person who advocated the test. The FSM Pathology Advisory Group includes many distinguished pathologists from Australia and New Zealand. Their [final advisory paper](#) was completed in August 2013 and was supported by [The Royal College of Pathologists of Australia \(RCPA\)](#).

The results of pathology tests are often the basis for consumer decisions in healthcare. Unless patients making health-related choices on the basis of a pathology test are confident that the result is accurate and reliable, and that they have qualified medical advice, then they may make poor decisions.

The advisory paper has been sent to the new Federal Minister for Health, Hon Peter Dutton. It looks at a variety of tests which are funded by private health insurers or paid for by the patient because there is no Medicare

rebate for these pseudo-tests. It makes recommendations to the Federal government on the accreditation of laboratories conducting non-validated non-Medicare tests, the qualifications of the practitioners who order them and the rights of patients.

Non-Medicare-approved tests which have no proven validity include ‘live blood analysis’, ‘clot retraction tests’, ‘Vega tests’, ‘electro-dermal screening’, Reflexology, Iridology and kinesiology testing.

FSM issued a Media Release through the valuable services of the Australian Science Media Centre. There was immediate media coverage of the recommendations. We will keep our supporters informed of the Federal Government’s response to the guidelines.

FSM wrote to the National Boards and a number of associations asking for endorsement of this report. The Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australasia (COCA) quickly and positively responded:

*“While we consider the “diagnostic tests” to which you refer to be outside the scope of chiropractic and osteopathic practice, **COCA supports any initiative that promotes evidence based, patient centred care and is aimed at improving health outcomes.**”*

# University news

## University of Queensland

The *Centre for Integrative Clinical and Molecular Medicine* has been shut down.

## University of Sydney

In our last newsletter, we mentioned that FSM wrote to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney to bring his attention to the university logo on [IMGateway](#), along with a list of university staff who were (it claimed) the website's scientific advisors. Owned by Unity Health, it promotes a range of questionable alternative interventions. We received a positive response, and the references were removed. We followed this up with a letter to the Vice Chancellor, University of Queensland, one of whose academics was also listed. We received a positive response from the University. The academic's name is no longer listed on the web page. FSM congratulates the two universities for their prompt attention to these actions.

## University of Technology, Sydney

In August, The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) launched the *Australian Research Centre in Complementary and Integrative Medicine* (ARCCIM). The Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) has provided a \$466,000 grant for a study into practice-based chiropractic that will look into everything **except** the question which interests FSM – *"does chiropractic work for the diseases so many chiropractors claim to be able to treat?"*. As the study is not intended to differentiate between placebo and evidence-based treatments, it is likely to add little in the way of an evidence base for chiropractic. This study will probably answer questions like *"Why do people go to chiropractors?"*

With a vision *"to achieve a fundamental paradigm shift in healthcare direction where chiropractic is recognised as the most effective and cost efficient health regime of 1st choice that is readily accessible to all people"*, the CAA claims that this study will *"iron out cracks in the evidence base"* but it does not appear to be funding any relevant randomised clinical trials (RCTs).

## RMIT

FSM wrote to Prof Margaret Gardiner AO, Vice-Chancellor (VC) & President, & Professor Gill Palmer, Deputy VC & Vice-President of RMIT

regarding FSM's concerns about the promotion of pseudoscientific concepts at RMIT. These include '[energy medicine](#)', fundamentalist chiropractic and [cranial osteopathy](#). We expressed the view that some features of their Health Science program are likely to damage the academic reputation of the university. RMIT has not responded.

## Victoria University

We wrote to Prof Peter Dawkins, VC & President of Victoria University, requesting an investigation into the university's [active promotion of cranial osteopathy](#). Victoria University also [hosts courses](#) on osteopathy for practicing osteopaths.

Victoria University responded that cranial osteopathy *"involves discussion and critical appraisal of the approach considering the current evidence"* and that it is a component of a unit for final year students that *"does not aim to prepare students to use cranial technique in practice"* but *"rather anatomical knowledge, surface anatomy and critical appraisal and reflection"* and that they would *"update the unit to reflect the current practice"*. The VC acknowledged that *"Osteopathy in the past has often relied on theoretical considerations and anecdotal experience"* but that they now offer *"quality educational programs that emphasise evidence-informed practice to produce skilled, knowledgeable and reflective practitioners"*.

FSM also raised concerns about the implied endorsement of cranial osteopathy by the hosting of *The Sutherland Cranial Teaching Foundation of Australia and New Zealand (SCTFANZ)* courses at Victoria University. The university will be reviewing their policy on this matter.

FSM remains concerned that several lecturers in their Osteopathy degree are associated with SCTFANZ (see above). Also, earlier this year, Victoria University announced a [paediatric osteopathy clinic](#), that is, one that targets babies with *"poor feeding, colic, reflux, and a variety of functional problems"*. The scientific credibility and ethics of Victoria University in promoting such non-evidence-based and potentially dangerous fringe health practices is very questionable and should be addressed from within its own council.

# Chiropractic

The Chiropractic Board of Australia (CBA) and the Chiropractors Association of Australia (CAA) are joint recipients of the 2013 Australian Skeptics "Bent Spoon" Award, announced at the Skeptics National Convention in Canberra on 23 November. The Bent Spoon is awarded annually to the "perpetrator of the most preposterous piece of pseudoscientific piffle". The two organisations received the award for being largely ineffective in the face of unacceptable conduct by some of its members ... even members who are on the Board of the CAA itself. While both bodies make statements that discourage or prohibit certain unfounded claims about efficacy, particularly on the wide range of health conditions that chiropractors can supposedly treat, many practitioners continue to state that they can treat such conditions as asthma, ADHD, bed wetting and ear infections. Some continue to use the debunked theory that all diseases stem from a 'misaligned' nervous system, something the president of the CAA has said was abandoned a hundred years ago.

Australian Skeptics President, Richard Saunders stated: "While the number of members behaving unacceptably might be a minority of the total membership, there has been enough unacceptable conduct to warrant firm and definitive corrective action by both organisations, but

that has not been done".

In other chiropractic news, FSM were contacted about a leaflet posted at a childcare centre in Western Australia by a chiropractor who asked that it be displayed as information for parents to help them make *"informed choices about vaccination"*. When this was brought to the attention of the centre's manager, it was promptly removed. She was unaware of concerns about chiropractic treatments for children, and horrified at their anti-immunisation propaganda. Childcare centres, often first points of call for parents having difficulties, are in no position to judge the veracity of various options, but can only pass on information. The recent claimed widespread crackdown by the CBA against anti-vaccination and other misleading claims by some registered chiropractors seems to be having a limited effect.

FSM wrote a second time to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) about our continuing concerns that the CBA *"is failing to successfully exercise its regulatory functions and in so doing places the community at risk."* The letter was accompanied by a substantial report consisting of images of false and misleading claims relating to asthma and behavioural problems. These were copied, with detailed images, from 200 chiropractic websites. To date, we are unaware of any action by the CBA that will lead to a modification of the claims made on these websites.

## AVN forced to change misleading name

In 2010, the Australian Vaccination Network Inc (AVN) was described by the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC) as a provider of "misleading, inaccurate, and deceptive" vaccination information. Earlier this year, the Director General, Department of Finance & Services directed the AVN to adopt a new name. The AVN appealed this decision. On 25 Nov, the NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal affirmed the magistrates original decision stating "without any information, other than the name, an ordinary member of the public would be likely to be misled into thinking that one of AVN's objectives is to give a pro-vaccination message or, at least, to provide comprehensive information about vaccination." Fair Trading Minister Anthony Roberts told the ABC: "The AVN must change its name now. We're awaiting advice from the AVN as to what they consider an appropriate name would be. "We reserve the right to reject any names we consider inappropriate, but again my clear message to the Australian Vaccination Network is be open and up-front about what you stand for." FSM congratulates Minister Roberts on the successful outcome and his efforts to protect the public from anti-vaccination misinformation.

The NSW parliamentary committee recently launched an inquiry into the HCCC's powers in relation to unregistered health groups. FSM will be submitting a response to this inquiry.

## Osteopathy

A submission was sent to Martin Fletcher, CEO of AHPRA requesting a review of the Osteopathy Board of Australia (OBA). 'Cranial Osteopathy' is a pseudoscientific intervention, where practitioners place their hands on the heads of patients claiming they can sense "*cranial rhythms*" or "*subtle stresses, strains and imbalances*" throughout their patients' bodies. It is promoted as a treatment for some childhood diseases.

The submission raised concerns that the [Chair](#) and several members of the OBA board are cranial osteopaths who target children and babies with "*Glue ear, recurrent ear infections which may lead to some hearing problems, Asthma/allergies/recurrent chest infections, sinus problems, Recurrent tonsillitis, Learning and behavioural difficulties, Some aspects of Delayed development (for instance in achieving milestones with speech and mobility, Headaches, 'Growing pains', Bedwetting and Postural problems, assisting in prevention of curvature of the spine/scoliosis.*"

Mr Fletcher's response included statements that:

- "*National Boards have the responsibility for exercising regulatory functions*", not AHPRA;

- "*osteopathy of the cranium* is a treatment approach that is included in approved programs of study and is part of "*gaining an approved qualification for registration*";
- cranial osteopathy is "*regularly performed and included as a treatment approach by numerous registered osteopaths*", and
- the word 'cure' is not used. (Osteopaths generally claim that they can 'treat' or 'help with' childhood conditions).

He stated that he was raising our complaints about Board members with the OBA and will consider advice within AHPRA as to whether or not these members are breaching the advertising provisions of the National Law. FSM's correspondence about the false and misleading claims made on a number of osteopathic websites are being passed on to the Statutory Offences Unit to review and take any action as appropriate.

According to a 4 June 2013 media release published on the [CBA website](#), "*AHPRA has been working with the ACCC and TGA to establish the most appropriate regulator for the area that we have control over, specifically regulated health services.*"

## Health Care Complaints Commission

On Wednesday 16 October 2013 the Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission resolved to conduct an [Inquiry](#) into "*The Promotion of False or Misleading Health-Related Information or Practices*". Submissions close 13 December 2013. FSM will be writing a submission. We encourage you to do the same.

## Fair Trading Qld souvenir crack down

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) Queensland has penalised a number of souvenir shops and online distributors on the Gold Coast for [making false and misleading claims](#) about the health benefits, country of origin and ingredients of goods as well as massively inflating prices – some by up to 4000 per cent. Executive Director of Fair Trading, Brian Bauer revealed that products such as 'essence' of Red Kangaroo; squalene sourced from shark liver; and placenta from sheep and cows were falsely claimed to have health benefits ranging from assisting with diabetes, cirrhosis and hepatitis, to being able to cure cancer."

FSM are pleased to see the OFT taking action to protect both local and visiting consumers from being exploited by unscrupulous business practices.



# World Health Organisation & acupuncture

Under 'Diseases and disorders that can be treated with acupuncture' the [WHO website states](#) that it has been *"proved - through controlled trials to be an effective treatment"* of 28 conditions and effective, but needs more proof for 63 more. WHO's 'evidence' comes from a 1979 report, drafted by a Chinese integrative medicine 'doctor'. In 2003, WHO re-visited the effectiveness of acupuncture, giving it a *"ringing endorsement"*. Their uncritical, out-dated document, which includes numerous studies more than four decades old, is referred to by industry associations, university students, private health

funds and thousands of practitioner websites as 'evidence'.

More than [60 Cochrane Reviews](#) relate to acupuncture. Most do not support the WHO claims. In January 2011, [The Cochrane Collaboration](#) was accepted as a Non-Governmental Organisation in Official Relations with WHO.

FSM received a positive response from WHO that they were *"coordinating global experts to update the publication"* and would *"invite the expert/experts at the Cochrane Center to join the review and analysis of relevant data"*, however, no details of the proposed acupuncture update were provided.

## Nursing & Midwifery

Following the recent controversy regarding some volunteers expressing anti-vaccination views and not complying with Health Department policy, the Australian Breastfeeding Association issued a [media statement](#). They stated in relation to vaccination that they do *"not elevate, nor promote, one view above another"*. FSM remains disappointed at the indecisive response of this influential organisation. A second letter was subsequently sent to the ABA to address our concerns about their lack of immunisation policy and making some positive suggestions.



## FSM correspondence

FSM sent letters to:

**Asthma Foundation of WA**  
**David Johnson, CEO**

We requested an amendment to their fact sheet on *"Complementary Therapies and Asthma"*, as it was recommending chiropractic, acupuncture and homeopathic interventions for this serious disease.

FSM received a response that *"the reference has been hidden from public view until a complete review has been conducted by our Medical & Science Advisory Committee."*

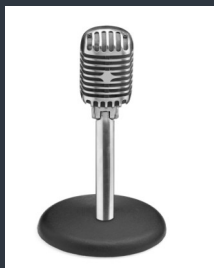
A good outcome, and FSM applauds their response.

**Woolworths Ltd**  
**Grant O'Brien, Managing Director & CEO**

FSM requested a revision of their Bay and Toddler website which was promoting 'cranial osteopathy'.

We received a letter from Woolworths that the page discussing this intervention has been removed, as has the link to it, from the practitioner website responsible for the content.

Another good outcome and FSM similarly applauds their quick response.



## FSM in the media

FSM was interviewed by a [number of journalists](#) following the revelation that in 2012 a four-month old baby in Victoria was diagnosed with a 'hangman's fracture' following a chiropractic adjustment. This resulted in the baby spending seven months in a neck brace. The debate about whether the chiropractor was responsible for the injury continued over several weeks, ending up in Queensland Parliament when [Dr Alex Douglas MP](#) discussed both the inappropriate release of a confidential paper by AHPRA and the evidence that confirmed a fracture. Dr Douglas stated that the investigation, conducted by a chiropractor, resulted in "a false report" as it stated that the baby's neck was not broken and

cleared the chiropractor of any wrong doing, whereas a later CT scan on the infant clearly identified new bone growth, a clear indication of a fracture. The parents had taken the baby to the chiropractor for 'adjustments' on six occasions over a 5 week period prior to the injury.

Dr Douglas concluded that *"APHRA people need to immediately investigate how this confidential release occurred. We need to find out exactly what occurred to this child, and we must never, ever see this happen again"*. The current [Victorian Health Minister](#) was formerly a chiropractor.

## Public activities

Professor Marcello Costa was a keynote speaker at [The Joanna Briggs Institute International Convention](#) "The 2013 campaign for getting evidence into policy". Loretta Marron presented at the [New Zealand Skeptics Conference 2013](#) and the [Australian Prosthodontic Society](#) (Qld Branch).

Dr Annette Katelaris has conducted a number of

interesting [podcasts for Medical Observer](#). This includes a recent interview with [Dr Ken Harvey](#) about his battle against the false and misleading claims from the \$4 billion complementary medicine industry, his efforts to strengthen TGA regulations for improved consumer protection and the struggle to achieve [transparency of payments](#) by the therapeutic goods industry to health professionals.

## Publications

### 'The Bitter Pill' - Australasian Science

- Dr Wendy Daniels - [The Natural Logic of Health Care](#)
- A/Prof John Hayman - [Darwin's diagnoses](#)
- Tory Shepherd - [Call Out the Quacks](#)

### EdzardErnst.com

- Prof Edzard Ernst - [Should the National Institute of Clinical Excellence recommend placebos?](#)
- [Evidence-based chiropractic is an oxymoron](#)
- [Drowning in a sea of misinformation \(a 15 part series\)](#)

### The Conversation

- Dr Mick Vagg - ['Integrative' sewing: trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear](#)
- [Flogging a dodgy cancer 'cure'? Say what you like, the TGA won't stop you](#)
- [The chiropractic war with reality rages on...](#)
- [PathoLOLgical testing. Actually it's not so funny](#)
- Prof Ian Musgrave - [Death by caffeine really is a thing, if you're susceptible](#)

### BMJ

- Prof Donald Marcus- [Turning a blind eye to alternative medicine education](#)

### I2P

- Loretta Marron - [Osteopathy - massage or mumbo jumbo?](#)
- [Immunisation - Measles, Mumps and Misinformation](#)

### MJA

- Amanda Stephens et al - [Treatment failure in atopic dermatitis as a result of parental health belief](#)

Please let **FSM** know if you have published any relevant articles, been on radio or TV (with links, if possible), or any of your activities that support the objectives of Friends of Science in Medicine.